

Ex-Congressman Is Encouraged By Castro's View On Prisoners

By ROBERT A. SMITH
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WASHINGTON — Ex-Congressman Charles O. Porter of Oregon has just returned from a 12-day trip to Cuba "encouraged" about the prospect of the Castro government releasing political prisoners but without securing a general amnesty.

Porter went to Havana in a dual capacity — an attorney representing an incorporated group of friends and relatives of imprisoned Cubans, and as a journalist to write an article for Look Magazine.

Castro's position, said Porter, is that "a general amnesty would have to be deferred until the United States stopped its aggressive actions through CIA-financed attacks on Cuba."

Asked what attacks Castro meant, Porter said the Cuban leader referred mostly to bombing attacks by light planes, usually approaching Cuba from the Bahamas. Another attack recently hit a lumber mill in Oriente Province, he said, and others have been aimed at industrial plants.

"They are sporadic and aren't of military importance," said Porter, "but they keep the Cuban people stirred up."

Porter said he had no information on whether the CIA is supporting these attacks. He said in the early days of the Castro revolution, it is said that the large sugar companies helped finance counter-revolutionary elements but that they have since given up

this as "money down a rathole." Cuban officials believe the CIA is the chief means of support left for counter-revolutionaries, as Castro calls them, according to Porter.

Fears Intelligence Leaks

Porter said Castro is not anxious to release prisoners whom he presumes will subsequently be recruited by the CIA for intelligence or counter-revolutionary efforts. He said there is no official count of the number of such prisoners, but that Cubans deny there are as many as 75,000, the estimate Porter received from the relatives he represents.

Castro agreed to permit formation of a counterpart organization in Havana, said Porter, to work with the government on creating standards by which certain prisoners might be released on an orderly basis. He said the priority categories would be those who had served a quarter of their sentences, women, the sick and aged and heads of families.

Porter said diplomatic sources estimate there are 300,000 Cubans who are seeking to leave Cuba. A slow but steady stream is leaving via Mexico, he said, and many more would go to the United States if they could get transportation. The Cuban government does not forbid their leaving, said Porter, except to prevent their taking either possessions or money with them.

More Talks Possible

The Eugene attorney said he may return to Cuba for further talks but probably not for several months.

He was denied a request to visit

the prisons where the political prisoners are held. He got outside Havana only once, to visit a chicken farm. Castro wanted him to see, Porter said he spent the remainder of his time talking with diplomats from Allied countries about conditions in Cuba, meeting with his clients who are in Havana, and reading Castro's speeches prior to two long talks with the Cuban dictator.

On one occasion Porter said he and Castro talked late into the night, from 9 p.m. until 3:45 a.m., and on another occasion from 9:45 a.m. to 1:45 p.m.

Upon his return to Washington, Porter reported on his talks to one of President Kennedy's White House aides, Arthur Schlesinger Jr.

The Kennedy administration did not officially recognize Porter's mission to Havana as an effort to gain release of political prisoners. He secured permission for the trip only in the capacity of a journalist.



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